SEMINAR

Change should be embraced, says innovation expert

BY KEVIN BARRETT
Telegraph-Journal

FREDERICTON – Rapid change in today's society is one of the few constants in life.

And embracing that change in a positive, enthusiastic fashion is not only encouraged, it's required for success in all corporate circles.

That was a message from innovation expert Jim Carroll during a three-hour seminar for the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce on Wednesday.

He will bring the same message to Saint John today in a full-day workshop at the Saint John Trade and Convention Centre.

In an extensive examination of trends in innovation and beyond, Mr. Carroll told his audience in Fredericton that resistance to change is a baby boomer concept that needed to be addressed because, "business is becoming far more complex than it ever has before."

He said community business leaders need to become aware of the global economy and that factors that affect it, such as the explosion in knowledge, whether it be advances in scientific research or heightened consumer awareness because of access to the Internet.

He talked of societal change from the positive economic attitudes that prevailed in the mid-1990s, to the fall of the dot.com world, the 9-11 attacks in New York and a wave of corporate ethics scandals.

He said the lack of optimism is apparent in New Brunswick as well.

"The buzz today seems even less than it was a few years ago," he explained. "We went from a period of irrational exuberance to what I call

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irrational pessimism."

His well-rounded and humorous approach touched on a number of areas of importance, including the growing influence of Chinese industry, the constant pressure to reduce costs and maintain profit margins in a growing competitive arena, and the concepts of hyper innovation and nano-life cycles of products.

For example, there was a time when product cycles could be measured in years, even decades. Now, some digital camera manufacturers point to a six-month life cycle for their products.

"We have to be innovative in everything we do," he said.

Mr. Carroll sees even more movement toward specialization in all sectors, a further outsourcing of routine tasks and a time when the concept of retirement fades because of longer life spans, limited funding and the need for the expertise of senior workers because of dwindling staff knowledge.

Then there is the notion that 37 per cent of the American states will soon feature similar demographic profiles as the retirement haven of Florida or that 65 per cent of today's pre-school children will be employed in roles and jobs that don't exist today.

Finding ways to capitalize on these trends is critical to corporate survival, he insisted.

For the retirement sector, it is finding a way to attract them to New Brunswick and capitalize on a trillion dollar market..

A few solutions range from understanding the urgency to deal with the trends and stepping up to the opportunity to restoring enthusiasm and destroying complacency.

To do that, he said it takes, amoung other things, courage, creativity, curiosity and collaboration of ideas.

"The changes are coming at us fast and furious, whether we like it or not," he said, adding, "If you say I am going to embrace this; it is a heck of a lot easier to do that than fighting it."

Noel Chenier/Telegraph-Journal

Innovation expert Jim Carroll gestures Wednesday as he speaks during a seminar sponsored by the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce.

And part of that energizing and acceptance of change means interacting with today's youth, those who fuelled the dot.com revolution, are in touch and have different attitudes about the tradition 9-5 work day.

He expressed support of the province's call centre industry for many reasons, but particularly as a vehicle for providing youth with an introduction to the corporate community where they acquire numerous skills.

"I think we should bring their energy and passion back to the economy," he said of today's youth. "They are different but we should harness that as opposed to being mystified by it."

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